

Health ministry scales back measures in schools for flu
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Korea FDA Warns Against A(H1N1) Claims, Notes aloe vera Is One of Only Four Ingredients Allowed to Claim Immune System Enhancement

Japanese tourists wearing surgical masks arrive at Incheon International Airport yesterday. Airline and travel agencies believe there will be a surge in the number of Japanese tourists visiting Korea as Japan will have its "silver" week from Sept. 19 to 23. [YONHAP]

The Education Ministry yesterday eased rules on schools for coping with students and A(H1N1) flu, saying preventive measures at schools are meaningless now that the virus has spread across the country.

Starting yesterday, the ministry will no longer force elementary, middle and high schools with at least one student infected with the new flu to shut down temporarily, and only patients will be prohibited from attending school.

In addition, the ministry will lift a measure requiring students returning from overseas to stay at home for seven days before returning to school. Only those showing suspicious symptoms will be asked to stay away.

The ministry launched a series of flu-related measures at schools in late August just before the new semester began.

"When the schools are shut down, students don't just stay home. They hang around in noraebang and game rooms, which raises the chance of infections," said Park Hee-geun, an official in the department for student health in the Education Ministry.

But students' temperatures will still be taken at school gates every morning, he added.

Meanwhile, an 81-year-old woman from South Jeolla died of complications from A(H1N1) influenza, bringing the nation's death toll to nine. She was confirmed as a flu patient on Aug. 3. A day earlier, a high school student in Daejeon fell into serious condition, said the Health Ministry, becoming the first teenage flu patient in Korea to be taken into intensive care.

The teenager has a development disorder, and the ministry has decided to include people with certain kinds of disabilities in the "high-risk" category for A(H1N1) treatment. The high-risk classification includes senior citizens, babies and people with chronic diseases.

Also, the Korea Food and Drug Administration yesterday warned against some food and drug products promoted as effective against the new flu. The agency, which is under the Health Ministry, said only four food ingredients—ginseng, red ginseng, aloe vera and shark liver oil—can be advertised as enhancing the immune system. The agency said even those four materials cannot be 100 percent reliable.

"Prevention and treatment of a specific disease belongs to medicine. Just because a food material has been recognized as effective, promoting it as a means of preventing A(H1N1) flu is against the law," said a KFDA spokesman.

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